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RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #1616/01 3220917
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 170917Z NOV 08
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0383
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 8746
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0198

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 001616

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - NIDA EMMONS
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS, CROSS-STRAIT
RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused November 15-17 news coverage on former President Chen Shui-bian, who was taken to hospital Sunday evening after having been on a hunger strike since he was detained last Wednesday; on the prosecutors' questioning of Chen's family members over the weekend in the course of the probe into the former first family's alleged money laundering; on students staging sit-ins in Taipei demanding that the government amend the Assembly and Parade Law; and on the G20 summit.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" urged the incoming Obama Administration to examine seriously the current rapprochement between the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party and "take note of its downside risk in the erosion of Taiwan's democracy and hard-won human rights and civic freedom." An op-ed piece in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" discussed Barack Obama's victory and said it is "likely to be a more conventional transfer of power than some might think, though it will encourage and inspire people everywhere." A separate "Taipei Times" op-ed discussed the chaos occurred during China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait Chairman Chen Yunlin's visit to Taiwan two weeks ago and said "Taiwan lost a lot of dignity for the sake of one or two days of excitement." End summary.

¶3. U.S.-Taiwan Relations

A) "Obama Must Note Taiwan's Crisis"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (11/17):

"The imminent inauguration of a new Democratic administration in the United States under president-elect Senator Barack Obama has fuelled both hopes and concern in Taiwan over Washington's future policy toward East Asian and cross-strait affairs, including Taiwan's present and future. ... Concern over Obama's future policy is rooted in the widespread belief that the right-wing Republican Party is more sympathetic toward Taiwan than the centrist Democratic Party, an impression based mainly on the shared anathema against the Chinese Communist Party ruled "Red China" between the Republican Party and the authoritarian Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) during the Cold War. Nevertheless, it was the fiercely anti-communist late Republican presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan who set the stage for Washington's recognition of the PRC in January 1979 and George W. Bush who cooperated with Beijing's high-pressure campaign against the Taiwan-centric Democratic Progressive Party government. ...

"Instead of following his predecessor's narrow path, we hope Obama can review current dynamics and inject more new strategic thinking into their current China-centric policy orientation that incorporates the value of a democratic Taiwan to the world community. ... Indeed, Ma's victory in the March 22 presidential poll was largely the result of a policy of 'regime change' in Taiwan

adopted to appease Beijing by the Bush administration, which repeatedly acted to de-legitimize the DPP's efforts to introduce direct democracy methods to improve governance and civic participation as well as bolster Taiwan-centric citizenship identity. In the wake of this 'regime change,' the Taiwan people have witnessed a series of unilateral moves by the KMT that constitute less a genuine cross-strait 'rapprochement' than the formation of a 'community of interest' between the quasi-authoritarian KMT and the authoritarian CCP.

"The KMT government's dismissal of opposition oversight and the sharp rise in dissatisfaction by an excluded citizenry, the blatant trampling on civic freedom in the overblown security blanket thrown around PRC envoy Chen Yunlin earlier this month and the repeated violations of due process in the recent series of detentions and indictments of DPP leaders are signs of a grave rollback in Taiwan democracy and human rights. ... We hope the upcoming Obama administration and those who will take charge of its East Asian policy will engage in a serious re-examination of the actual content of the current "rapprochement" between the KMT and CCP and take note of its downside risk in the erosion of Taiwan's democracy and hard-won human rights and civic freedom."

B) "Less Change in the US Than Some Might Say"

Chang Chi-yu, an associate professor at the Department of Applied English of Ming Chuan University, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (11/15):

"... An array of stories and events associated with the Obama frenzy begs the question: Will the US change? To be more specific, will it change into a more humble power? An unspoken corollary of this question deserves clarification. It is based on the assumption that RELATIONS

Obama as president, with an ethnic minority background, will tend to be more empathetic toward other states. Partly because of growing economic problems, the new government may not be as unilaterally tough as previous administrations when dealing with issues like nuclear weapons and terrorism that have long haunted the nation. However, the corollary doesn't hold if placed against the national interest and US history. The following philosophy remains deeply rooted in the American mindset and prevalent throughout the world: If nuclear weapons are secured by those with evil tendencies, then that is a threat to the US and the whole world. ...

"Obama's succession is likely to be a more conventional transfer of power than some might think, though it will encourage and inspire people everywhere. Because belief in change is widespread and because there is considerable scope for change, many can't wait to see the degree to which a nation in ethnic and political flux will transform itself. But one thing will never change: America is more humble, in its own way, though not in a way that suggests cowardice or weakness. That has nothing to do with whether the president is black or white."

14. Cross-Strait Relations

"Uproar over Visit a Loss for Taiwan"

Chang Teng-chi, an associate professor at the Institute of Strategic and International Affairs Studies of National Chung Cheng University, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (11/17):

"... Another factor to consider is the ongoing effort of the US, China and Japan to seek detente, and the worldwide wave of support for US president-elect Barack Obama, motivated as it is by the desire for peace. In this context, international media expressed hopes for a successful SEF-ARATS meeting. Zhang and Chen's visits were viewed as a matter of international relations, which in itself was a good thing for Taiwan's dignity. In the event, however, international media reported how Zhang was "knocked to the ground." The treatment meted out to Zhang tarnished the image of Taiwan's democracy and conversely served to highlight Beijing's soft offensive strategy. How did we miss these opportunities and where did we go wrong? The DPP must bear a considerable part of the blame.

"Taiwan is an island society that has been colonized in turn by several powers and whose economy depends heavily on foreign trade. It must step warily among the sometimes clashing titans of Europe, the US, Japan and China. China, for its part, has long since infiltrated Taiwan's commercial sector and its ruling and opposition political forces, and it knows how to use its connections. When in government, the DPP was only willing or able to passively 'manage' the situation. Its dream of blockading China was a non-starter, and it let slip the opportunity of using Taiwan's 'pro-localization' forces to win concessions from China. Instead, the DPP became all the more dependent on its habit of using Chinese repression to garner dignity and actively seeking out such repression for the sake of winning sympathy votes. ...

"While China is full of confidence in its hard power, when it comes to soft power, its boasting cannot conceal its weaknesses. Taiwan could put its own strong points to the best advantage by opening a psychological counteroffensive and engaging in peaceful rivalry with China on such issues as food safety, welfare, charity, democracy and plurality. Such a strategy would gain the support of disparate forces within Taiwan and help it maintain a dynamic equilibrium with the US, China and Japan. This is the only way to prevent Taiwan's identity and the sovereignty of the ROC from being destroyed by internal strife, and it is the only way to win back the dignity that has been lost."

YOUNG